

Ambassador Charles A. Ray
The Future of U.S.-Zimbabwe Relations
SAPES Trust Dialogue
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Thank you, Ibbo, for your kind introduction.

Officials of the Government of Zimbabwe,
Political party leaders,
Members of Parliament,
Scholars,
Captains of industry,
Members of the Press,
Friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor and a pleasure for me to be the featured speaker of today's Dialogue on the Future of U.S.-Zimbabwe Relations. The question of U.S.-Zimbabwe relations is timely yet complex; it is the subject of extensive public debate and speculation. If pursued in the right way, it can provide a foundation for a renewed partnership based on mutual respect and common interests that can render both of our countries more stable and prosperous.

Still, standing before you today, I recognize fully that the future of U.S.-Zimbabwe relations is not just a matter in the hands of the United States. Standing before you as the sole speaker tonight, I am at a bit of a disadvantage and am able to provide just one side of the story. It is like hearing about the future of a marriage, with just the husband providing his thoughts; like the path forward in a friendship, from one single perspective; or the prospects of a joint venture by just one business partner.

Fundamentally, though, I stand here before you today recognizing fully that the future of U.S.-Zimbabwe relations depends just as much on the intentions, actions, and communication of Zimbabweans – within the government and the public alike – as it does on the intentions, actions, and communication from American counterparts. And so, it is with that disclaimer that I will share with you all tonight, my thoughts, and the sincere intentions of my government, on where we would like to see this relationship go in the months and years to come.

I will be among the first to recognize that the bilateral relationship today is like a dysfunctional friendship or a faltering joint venture. Despite a strong initial foundation, both sides have made mistakes along the way. Both sides have hurt, and have been hurt. From both sides, our actions and words have, at times, sought to cause pain.

And, for a while, we were so steeped in our respective roles of sniping and accusing that we lost sight of the bigger, broader areas of collaboration and our mutual interests. Some of us – on both sides – cut off communications at exactly the time when we needed to be communicating *more*. As we reduced our interactions, nuance became the first casualty. We adopted more absolutist vocabulary. Increasingly we spoke about “They *always* do this...,” “they are *all* this way...,” or “we *never* do that.” Over time, parts of the bilateral relationship showed signs of distress. Through our actions and public statements, we seemed to actively cultivate a loss of confidence between each other. While the people-to-people relationships between our two great countries has continued to thrive, at the government-to-government level both sides made mis-steps and both sides are deserving of a share of the blame for the degraded state of the formal bilateral relationship.

Today’s talk, however, is not about the *history* of U.S.-Zimbabwean relations, but rather the *future* of our relationship.

While we should maintain an honest and sincere perspective of where we have come from and learn from our mistakes, we must also recognize that we cannot change the past. Instead, we should focus on how to rebuild each other’s confidence to foster renewed relationships and refocus on a positive way forward.

We hear a lot these days about Zimbabwe’s “re-engagement” with so-called “western” countries. I tend to dismiss that phrasing, because we have never stopped engaging: we have always maintained full diplomatic relations, Zimbabwe has always had a full Ambassador in Washington and I represent an unbroken continuum of Ambassadors here dating back to independence. But, given the clear degradation of the quality of our government-to-government relationship, instead of focusing on “re-engagement,” instead I think what is most important now is “*recultivating* our partnership.” *That*, I believe, should be the first step in “The Future of U.S.-Zimbabwe Relations.” As a first step in that effort, it may be worth debunking some misperceptions and clarifying with complete candor some key perspectives from the U.S. side:

- The U.S. does not favor any one party over another in Zimbabwe. We want to see an environment where all parties have the same ability to present themselves to the public and to compete to represent the people in government.
- The U.S. wants to see a non-violent and credible electoral contest and for the people’s will to be honored.

- It is not for the U.S. or any other outsider to dictate or influence who should make up the government; that is for the Zimbabwean people alone to decide. As long as the process is credible and respected, we do not care which party wins. Let me repeat that: “We do not care which party wins, as long as the process is legitimate.”
- The U.S. fully believes that ZANU-PF will, and should, continue to play an important role in Zimbabwe’s future; we are not anti-ZANU-PF and we do recognize the many achievements that ZANU-PF has had over the decades for the good of the Zimbabwean people.
- At the same time, we believe that MDC-T, MDC-N, and other political parties also have critically important roles to play – possibly in leading, but certainly in contributing to the country’s future. We value the role of these parties to ask tough questions, to propose alternative views, and to challenge the way things have always been done.
- We recognize the value of the coalition government arrangement in bringing diverse views together and we respect the government officials who have engaged across party lines to foster Zimbabwe’s current recovery.
- Just as we recognize that there are destabilizing extremist elements in each of Zimbabwe’s political parties, we also recognize that there are progress-minded patriots in all parties across the political divide. We welcome the opportunity to collaborate closely with those committed to building strong national institutions and moving the country forward, and we will continue to work to minimize the negative effects of those intent on circumventing the rule of law.
- We will continue to press for the protection of human rights and accountability for those who abuse them while acknowledge progress where it is made.
- We fully recognize the opportunities presented by Zimbabwe’s current economic recovery and the U.S. is actively working to draw the attention of U.S. business to trade and investment opportunities here.
- Finally, as Zimbabwe’s political parties implement fully the commitments that they themselves have made in the Global Political Agreement, as state institutions are delinked from partisan allegiances, and as credible elections are held and honored, there will be no reason for the United States to retain our current sanctions policy in place.

I do not think that any of these objectives is terribly contentious. I would argue that those most likely to feel concerned when they hear some of these statements are those who recognize the illegitimacy of their positions of privilege or who recognize the abuses of authority in their own records. Still, each of these positions is fully consistent with the constitution and laws of Zimbabwe and I believe fundamentally that the overwhelming majority of Zimbabweans – in politics and otherwise – can agree to these principles.

Putting all of this together, I can easily envision U.S.-Zimbabwe relations in the not-too-distant future that are comparable to U.S. relations with any other partner in the community of nations:

- Open flows of communications where we can share ideas, express concerns, applaud progress, and disagree without being disagreeable;
- A strong development assistance program in which U.S. assistance supports intrinsically the government's development agenda and is devised in close consultation with the Zimbabwean government;
- A gradual transition from foreign-assistance-to-a-developing-partner to robust economic-relations-with-a-prosperous-partner;
- Vibrant trade and investment linkages with goods, services, experts, and tourists flowing freely between our countries; and
- No sanctions or restrictive measures in place because the rule of law is protected by strong state institutions and respected across the political spectrum.

The next question, of course, is how do we get from where we are today, to this next stage in U.S.-Zimbabwean relations? Again, I will address this from the side of the intent and efforts of the United States.

The U.S. operates from the fundamental assumption that the people and governments of both the United States and Zimbabwe want to see a stable and prosperous Zimbabwe. To achieve that goal, the U.S. focuses on several major areas: developing and bolstering democratic institutions, fostering economic growth and trade, supporting the provision of social services, and providing humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations. In pursuing these efforts, we will continue to operate exclusively in line with the law and constitution of Zimbabwe as established through the will of the Zimbabwean people.

Since these notions are still a bit vague, let me lay out some examples. I mentioned that we are working to develop and capacitate democratic institutions. As with many countries, the United States' approach to development is informed significantly by our own experience of best practices that have worked in our country. Over our 235 years of experience we have seen that stability and good governance comes through a transparent and accountable political system with checks and balances on power and robust outside oversight through civil society and the media.

We have learned that when the strict differentiation between the political party, the government, and the institutions of the state are breached the public's interest begins taking a back seat to vested interests of those in positions of power. We have learned this through trial and error in devising remedies to the abuses of the system that have been attempted over the years. These same protections: checks and balances; a watchdog role by the non-governmental sector; and the differentiation between party, government, and state, are all also provided for under Zimbabwe's laws and constitution.

With fewer years of experience as an independent state, more limited resources, and two decades of Zimbabwe's post-independence history as a de facto one-party state, some democratic institutions in Zimbabwe have not thoroughly matured or even been established yet.

A major thrust of U.S. efforts in and with Zimbabwe is to support these foundation institutions: an activist parliament, independent courts, a responsible media, a professional electoral commission, an apolitical military, transparent civil society organizations, a non-partisan police force, skilled regulatory bodies, and the like. These are institutions that Zimbabweans – and the Zimbabwean government – have established. They were established for a reason. We are not interested in imposing our way on any of these groups and we fully understand that Zimbabwe's democracy will have its own character and will not be a duplicate of any other specific model from the U.S., Europe, or elsewhere. But still, these Zimbabwean institutions are only as good as they can fulfill their mandates. So the role of the U.S. partnership is to provide resources, expertise, recommendations, and public goodwill to embolden and to enable these institutions to play their role.

Let's be clear, strong institutions make taking actions more difficult and lengthier. While often frustrating, our experience has been that that frustration is more than a reasonable cost to incur in order to experience the benefit that these institutions bring in preventing any one group from taking advantage of the broader society. President Obama would almost certainly find it easier today to just lift the U.S. debt ceiling, rather than have to negotiate a compromise with Congress. President Nixon certainly was not a fan of a free press when the Washington Post broke the story of Watergate. Whites in the southern United States certainly were not impressed with the Supreme Court when it ruled that segregation of the races was unconstitutional. Don Rumsfeld certainly did not appreciate civil society's insistence on establishing an investigation into events at Abu Graib.

Strong democratic institutions made life difficult for these individuals, but the views of Obama, Nixon, Rumsfeld, or southern whites were not the only views that mattered and history has shown time and again that by having these institutions in place has made the country better off. Similarly, there are, and will continue to be, those in Zimbabwe who are less than thrilled with the extra scrutiny that their actions face as the country's institutions become more robust. It will be inconvenient. And our support to those institutions is not meant or designed to inconvenience or penalize those individuals. Instead, it is designed to serve the country and its citizens more broadly through the laws and institutions that Zimbabweans have put in place.

Another issue that I believe would contribute to a stronger future relationship is if both sides fostered a more open and issue-oriented communications environment. Too often in the past, we have talked "at" each other rather than with each other. In an environment where all points of view can be freely expressed and candidly discussed we can make real progress. Stifling opposing points of view, or views with which we disagree; stifling free speech, only makes us all less well informed.

I can think of no better way of putting this than was expressed by former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami in his inauguration speech before the Iranian Parliament in 1997, when he said, “The most stable and lasting system is the one which creates the least limitations to freedom of expression. In my view, freedom means freedom of thought and security to express those thoughts without fear of prosecution.” He went on to say, “A government’s authority is not realized by coercion or arbitrariness, but by legal acts, by respect for rights and by encouraging people’s participation in decision making. People must believe that they have the right to determine their own destiny and that there are limits to government. We must try not to impose our personal preferences on our society at all costs. The government should even protect the rights of its opponents.” If we can square this circle, we will go a long way to establishing a relationship that addresses our mutual interests and needs in a credible way.

I mentioned the U.S. focus on fostering economic growth in Zimbabwe and the expansion of trade and investment ties between our two countries.

Now I know, I know, many of you are out there saying “oh come on, we all know about your sanctions.”

Yes, it is true, Americans cannot do business with about 120 Zimbabweans, about 60 of the farms or companies they own, or a dozen public enterprises. But let me say that if this economy is that dependent on 120 people and a few dozen companies then we should be concerned about a lot more than just sanctions. And as soon as the parties honor their commitments under the GPA to allow for a return of the rule of law, once state institutions are separated from partisan allegiances, and once credible elections are held and honored, there will be no reason to retain the few restrictions that are in place.

Still, the fact is that the economy is much more vibrant than just the contributions of these few people and companies. And, the U.S. is actively promoting Zimbabwe’s economic recovery. We have a highly successful loan guarantee program to pump much needed capital back into the agricultural sector to promote food security and help return Zimbabwe to its rightful status as the breadbasket of the region. We are working in the dairy, poultry, coffee, tea, and niche horticulture sectors to add value to produce at the local level and establish market linkages within Zimbabwe and outside.

We are working within the Kimberley Process to reach a consensus agreement to allow for Zimbabwe to export certified diamonds from Marange while ensuring that the workers and local communities’ rights are respected.

One of the efforts that I am most excited about is my Embassy’s work in promoting more and better awareness among the American private sector of the huge opportunities that exist for both of our countries through expanded trade and investment relations. Earlier this year, my colleague and I attended a major international conference on doing business with Africa.

Over the course of four days we spoke to hundreds of representatives from U.S., European, and African businesses and handed out information sheets that started with “Zimbabwe is Open for Business.” Given the interest that we sparked from that event, we put on a trilateral business dialogue in conjunction with the Corporate Council on Africa and Business Unity South Africa where we brought together a dozen firms each from the U.S., South Africa, and Zimbabwe in Victoria Falls in June to talk about the opportunities for business here. We had Microsoft, Proctor and Gamble, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Cargill, General Electric, and many other firms here to see for themselves the prospects for business in Zimbabwe.

Building on the success of that event, we are now working with the American Business Association in Zimbabwe – or ABAZ – to assemble a delegation of Zimbabwean business leaders to attend a U.S.-Africa Business Summit in Washington, DC. There, they will lead a day-long seminar on “Doing Business in Zimbabwe” that is expected to reach over 250 American firms and government officials.

These kinds of activities are only going to continue as we move forward. And, again, we are eager to work closely with the business community and Zimbabwean government across the political spectrum to find new and collaborative ways to build on these efforts for the mutual benefit of our two countries.

There is so much more that we are doing, but I am conscious of the time and want to allow plenty of time for discussion. And, let me just affirm that, beyond the political and economic engagement that I have detailed already, the U.S. will continue with our “bread and butter” activities and partnerships with the Zimbabwean people.

We will continue providing support for social service delivery and our commitment to work with this government and civil society to support the health sector, combat the scourge of HIV/AIDS, prevent the spread and effects of malaria, provide textbooks to schools, bolster the health sector institutions, and provide emergency assistance if and where it may be needed.

We will continue to advocate for the respect and protection of human rights, workers’ rights, and equal protection for women and children. We will continue to speak out when state prosecutors pursue politically-biased agendas and when the police are directed to serve as extensions of a party rather than institutions of the state. We will continue to monitor and bring to light all such abuses of the rule of law in Zimbabwe. And, let me be clear. We do not monitor and produce reports on these dynamics because we want to play “gotcha.”

We don’t do it because we want to support any particular party or perspective or because we want to score political points by casting blame. And, we certainly don’t do it because we think that we are devoid of these very challenges in the U.S.; we are not.

Instead, we advocate for these issues because it is the right thing to do to make the country stronger. We advocate for the protection of rights because Zimbabweans themselves have decided to enshrine these rights and ensure for their protection in your own laws, constitution, and international obligations. We highlight abuses not to accuse, but to shed light on events so that they can be stopped. Our intentions are not malicious, but rather are to provide incentives – and often assistance – to help protect the human integrity of all Zimbabweans.

Of course, the United States is much more than just the United States Government or U.S. Embassy. People-to-people relations between our countries remain strong and I fully expect them to continue to flourish. Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 occurred in the age of television and when the American "baby boomers" were in their 30's. As such, Zimbabwe's independence still retains a prominent position in the memory of the American public who continue to feel goodwill toward the country and its people. Americans remain in one of the top positions in terms of numbers of tourists to Zimbabwe. In the years to come, there are bountiful opportunities for further partnerships between religious communities, youth organizations, tourist travel, trade delegations, and the like. We can all play active roles in promoting such interactions.

And so, in summary, I fundamentally believe that the future of U.S.-Zimbabwe relations is bright. While the path will not always be smooth, there is no reason why it cannot always be on a positive trajectory. I see our relationship being punctuated not by restrictions or impediments, but by opportunities. The task is for each of us to seize them.

Whether you prefer thinking about "re-engagement" or "recultivating our partnerships," the first step is dialogue. As the personal representative of President Obama in Zimbabwe, I take very seriously his position of extending an open hand despite past disagreements. The benefits of a better relationship are well worth the at-times-uncomfortable conversations that may ensure. Still, the people of both of our countries deserve better. And so, my message is the same to our closest of friends and to those with whom we have had the most conflicted of relationships:

If you are coming from a position of sincerity and respect, my hand is open, my door is open, and my mind is open. Let's have those tough conversations. When we must, let's disagree, but do so without being disagreeable. When we can, let's collaborate to advance our common interests. But let us re-open those lines of communication that have closed and rebuild the bridges of mutual confidence that we have allowed to fall into disrepair for the people of both of our great nations.

Thank you.